

**A NEW APPROACH TO THE WORK OF
CHRYSANTHOS OF MADYTOS:
THE NEW METHOD OF MUSICAL NOTATION IN
THE GREEK CHURCH AND THE ΜΕΓΑ
ΘΕΩΡΗΤΙΚΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΜΟΥΣΙΚΗΣ***

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The Greeks owe the musical notation used today in their churches to Chrysanthos of Madytos, Gregory the Protopsaltes and Chourmouzios the Chartophylax. This notational system, known today as the New Method, was formulated by them in Constantinople in 1814.

The extant information about the development of Byzantine notation from the fall of Constantinople to the 19th century vividly illustrates the fact that Greek church musicians had become increasingly more confused and puzzled by the old system. At the same time Byzantine hymns were being sung more and more from oral tradition despite the fact that a series of attempts had been made to simplify the existing notation.

Illustration of the chaos

The first notice about 'the need of characters for the music of the Greeks' was made as early as the mid-16th century in a treatise of a student of Zarlino, a Greek Cypriot named Hieronymus. Realizing that his fellow countrymen had for

some time misunderstood their notation and had confused one neume with another, he invented a system of his own, drawing both from Byzantine and European notational methods [1]*.

Hieronimus's system received almost no attention and was soon forgotten.

Around the middle of the 17th century several of the older music books were interpreted with the understanding that their neumes were stenographic symbols which represented more or less lengthy groups of notes or extended melismata [2]*. This interpretation, however, was not uniformly held in Greece. Rather, it was based on the tradition and the opinion of each teacher but not on art; and in one case they are chanted in one way and in the other in some other way; and in one *echos* [mode] they are chanted in one way and in another in some other way. And one teacher chants them in one way and another teacher of the same art in another way; and one teacher makes in one case a melodic line of some kind, a second teacher of the same art gives another interpretation and a third teacher, something different [3]*. Each teacher of the art invented his own “method of interpretation”, improving upon the system which he had learned from his teacher [4]*. The failure of these improvements became so clear, that Patriarch Gregory V showed great interest in the radical reforms proposed in 1797 by Agapios Paliermos who recommended the introduction of European staff notation in the Greek Church. The Patriarchate, naturally conservative and opposed to Westernization, rejected this proposal. Agapios then suggested the adoption of an alphabetical system of his own invention. This was given more consideration, but rejected all the same.

In order to preserve the religious, political and economic privileges bestowed on it by the Ottoman Porte since 1453, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople adopted, during the entire period of Turkish ascendancy, a strongly conservative attitude which was seriously criticized by the liberal and progressive laity. This ideology of the Patriarchate may be considered valuable from one point of view, namely, for the influence it had in preventing an early break with tradition. But owing to its lack of initiative in organizing elementary education for the majority of Greeks who did not have the opportunity to study abroad or in the schools of the Patriarchate, there were destructive results [5]*. For this reason it has been stated that the level of education in Greece at the beginning of the 19th century was no higher than that of the 11th century in Western Europe [6]*. With this situation at hand it is legitimate to assume that any attempt to reform the notation, whether conceived in Europe or in Constantinople, was made known only to a limited number of Greeks. The vast majority of the chanters learned the music by heart, as sung in their immediate locality and were not concerned whether their versions resembled the written prototypes. Already, from the middle of the 17th century, European travellers expressed their surprise at the fact that the Greeks never used their music books, but learned the hymns by ear [7]*.

There were two factors which accounted for the decadence of the musical notation. One arose as a result of misunderstanding by the educated and the other because of the ignorance of the uneducated. By the 18th century both factors became glaring realities. European travellers, now more abundant, were shocked at the ignorance of the Greeks. The French scholar, Villoteau, the first Western musician to deal

seriously with the music of the Greek Church, was frustrated because, after a five-month search, he found only one person able to explain a manual of the notation—and even this explanation was imperfect [8]*.

The Greek musician, Constalas, was exasperated with the whole situation: “What is the right thing”, he asked, “Is it proper for both teachers and students of this art, after so many years of endeavour, to end in finding themselves in the middle of a vast sea, not knowing where they are?”[9]* This chaotic situation began to improve only after the reform of 1814.

The Reform

If, in spite of the great need for a simpler musical system, all previous attempts to achieve a reform had failed, it was because they adhered to one of two highly contradictory approaches: the first which completely broke with tradition, and the second which displayed the familiar complexity and lack of clarity. The three teachers secured the success of their new method by following a middle course. They endowed their system with a simplicity, clarity and economy which permitted musical printing [10]*. Furthermore, they adhered to the traditional system to a sufficient degree thereby permitting the adoption of the Method by the conservative Patriarchate.

Unlike their teachers, Chrysanthos and his collaborators absorbed many elements of European notation and unlike Hieronymus and even more Agapios, they disguised those elements in Greek clothings. The New Method preserved the earlier distinction between the quantitative and the qualitative neumes. The former indicated the actual notes, while the latter, the rhythmic and expressive nuances or ornaments which

applied to the notes. The quantitative neumes remained diastematic: they did not indicate frequency but the difference of two frequencies—not the pitch but the interval, and this only approximately, not distinguishing the difference between major, minor, diminished or augmented intervals. Hieronymus, who had considered this a defect, invented additional neumes for the exact indication of the intervals [11]*.

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The three teachers retained, instead, the use of the *martyriai* of the *echoi* which were to act both as key signatures from which the intervals were indicated precisely, and as symbols of the starting note from which all the following neumes established their pitches.

The principle by which the diastematic neumes operated was also preserved. Only those neumes indicating the interval of the ascending and descending second, the descending fourth and the *ison* (which indicates repetition) were used alone since they denoted both quantity and quality. All the other neumes represented quantity only and had to be combined with those indicating a second (their number exceeded all the others) in order to obtain some quality as well.

One innovation with respect to the diastematic neumes in the New Method was that they were reduced in number—from 15 to 10. For example, the six neumes of the ascending second were reduced to three, the two neumes of the descending second were reduced to one and the two neumes that symbolized a particular way of executing two consecutive descending seconds were also reduced to one. Moreover, the

allegorical grouping of the neumes into *bodies* (neumes for the intervals of a second) and *spirits* (neumes for intervals larger than a second) was abolished "not only because this division is inconsiderate.... but also because such prolixities are not permitted in music today" [12]*.

With regard to the qualitative neumes, whose number had reached 40 in the old system, the reformers were much more radical. Their system made use of only eleven. It cannot be estimated with certainty which of the so-called 'great signs' had their original meaning changed and whether these changes were imposed by the three teachers or had taken place earlier. It is certain, however, that in the New Method derivatives of three neumes in this category were used for the expression of rhythmical subdivisions corresponding to those of Western music [13]*. One of them was also used for the writing of tempo marks that expressed the value of one *chronos* [beat] in seconds or fractions of a second.

Another disguised Western element, the application of which had most positive results in music education, was the monosyllabic sol-fa system that replaced the awkward and fruitless solmization with the polysyllables of the intonation formulae" [14]*.

The disguised form of the Guidonian system [15]* " was composed by adding a vowel, a consonant or a diphthong to the first eight letters of the Greek alphabet (*pA, Bou, Ga, Di, kE, Zo, nE*). A directly formal change should also be mentioned, that is, the substitution of all Turkish musical terms with Greek words.

Finally, the reformers expressed the theoretical values of the intervals in both the Pythagorean system, where the

intervals corresponded to the lengths of a string and were symbolized as its ratios, and the Aristoxenean system used later in Europe by Ellis (born in the year of the reform), where the intervals were expressed as additions of a theoretical minimum unit. The New Method, according to P. G. Pelopides in his Foreword to the first edition of the *Μέγα θεωρητικὸν* (p. στ'), was accepted by the Holy Synod and the three reformers were appointed to teach it in the Third Music School of the Patriarchate which operated from 1815 to 1821.

The two publications of Chrysanthos

In 1819 the three teachers charged their student, A. Thamyris, to go to Paris in order to supervise the publication of a manual on the New Method [16]* designed, by Chrysanthos its author, as a school book. Its title in full was «Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὸ θεωρητικὸν καὶ πρακτικὸν τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μουσικῆς συνταχθεῖσα πρὸς χρῆσιν τῶν σπουδζόντων αὐτὴν κατὰ τὴν Νέαν Μέθοδον». The book was published in 1821. One year earlier, another student of the same school, Panagiotēs G. Pelopides, took, or according to G. Papadopoulos, [17]* bought from Chrysanthos the *Μέγα θεωρητικὸν*. This was a different kind of work, much broader in content and scope. As its title tells, it is a general theory of music, not only of ecclesiastical music. It is not addressed to the students of Church music alone, but to all Greek musicians and music lovers. It is a secular work and, as ...

The large number of sources known and used by Chrysanthos shows how extremely learned a man he was. This is particularly obvious when we consider the state of education in his time. Besides the sources already mentioned (the *Εἰσαγωγή*, [whose content is transferred almost entirely], and

De Musica,[some chapters of which - as, for example, the ones on rhythm - are also almost wholly taken over]), Chrysanthos makes frequent use of works by Aristoxenos, Euclid, Plato, Bacchius the Elder, the philosopher Gaudentius, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Manuel Bryennios, Suidas, Nicomachos of Gerasa, Anthimos Gazes, Athenaeos, Manuel Chrysaphes the Elder, and Plutarch, in addition to anonymous manuscripts, the Bible and French encyclopaedias.

These sources, however, are patched together in such a slipshod manner that they bewilder the contemporary reader. In many cases, Chrysanthos incorporates in his text entire fragments without caring for their stylistic and linguistic differences. When he cites them, he makes no use of quotation marks or of correct reference notes. In some cases he gives rather inadequate translations of ancient texts, changing only those words that seem to him to be too archaic. The opening sentence of the *Μέγα θεωρητικόν* is a case in point. It differs from its prototype only in its use of the verb 'to be', the modern Greek *εἶναι* having replaced the ancient *ἐστὶ*. Sometimes he gives a free translation of a fragment, at other times he paraphrases. Very often he collates the sentences of various texts or of various chapters of one text, either in translation or in the original language. Several of these idiosyncracies, or even all of them, are frequently combined within a few lines. In a few cases he quotes the original in a footnote and gives its translation in the text. But only in rare cases does he obey the rules of accurate citation.

Chrysanthos's documentation, when it appears, is similarly inconsistent. He usually gives either the name of the author alone, or the title of the work alone, or the author and a page number, or, at worst, an abridged name or title. For

example, « *Arist.* » gives the reader a choice among any of the works by Aristotle, Aristoxenos or Aristides Quiniillianus!

This careless manner of writing results in a heterogeneous linguistic style which contrasts enormously with the simplicity and flow of the author's first publication. However, the patchy quality of the *Μέγα θεωρητικόν*, despite its aesthetic irritation, acts as an unintended substitute for quotation marks and as a guide which can reveal original sources [20]*.

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Their abundance sufficiently illustrates the manner in which the work has been written and demonstrates that most of the information provided on ancient Greek music is not “connaissance d'amateur” [21]* but quotations or translations of ancient Greek theorists, put together by an amateur writer.

Chrysanthos and the restoration of Byzantine music

Chrysanthos has been considered by several Western scholars to be a musicologist who tried to revive Byzantine music but instead led it to its 'massacre' [22]*. But he lacked two important prerequisites to undertake such a revival, namely, musicological training and a basic knowledge of Byzantine history. Musicology was a field of studies that had not as yet appeared in any part of the world, let alone in Greece of the early 19th century which was still a province of Turkey [23]*. On the other hand, the study of Byzantine history which later led to the admiration of the achievements of the Byzantine civilization was only just beginning in Chrysanthos's time. At that time, Byzantium was more despised than appreciated. It was considered to be more or less a decadent civilization, a

shameful contrast to glorious antiquity [24]*. It is obvious therefore that the revival of Byzantine music is something that no Greek of the early 19th century could have undertaken.

The degree to which the Byzantine civilization was connected with the tradition of the Greek Church and the possibility, therefore, that such a revival could have been achieved as a result of religious rather than aesthetic needs should not be underrated.

But, here, again, ignorance of the historical development of the Byzantine civilization before and after 1453 prevented anyone from doubting the valid continuity of tradition. Moreover, the lack of admiration for that civilization resulted in numerous revisions and modifications of its music by post-Byzantine composers, who referred to them as “improvements” or “perfections”. For them there was nothing which gave credit to the belief presently held that the art of the 12th century was better or more suitable for the church than that of the 18th century. The hymns sung in the 19th century were considered by the Greek clergy, including Chrysanthos, to be untainted preservations or “perfections” of the old hymns, effected by their numerous “interpretations” [25]*.

The dissemination of the New Method

The dissemination of the New Method was not immediate. With the closing of the Third Patriarchal Music School in 1821, many of its students were appointed to teach in various Greek schools. Owing to the poor state of Greek education schools were to be found mostly in the rich Greek colonies in Europe and in the eastern Greek provinces that were under the influence of the Patriarchate. For example, G. Papadopoulos

states that the first exponents of the New Method taught in the Greek schools of Jasi, Bucarest, Odessa, Vienna, Aenos, Adrianople, Kydoniae, Mytilene, Smyrna, Chios and Trebizond [26]*, but not in any of the Greek provinces that were about to form the free, new Greek state. There, the official method of teaching chant notation was quite different. It involved the use of a number of novel signs, invented by George of Lesbos, that were introduced for the first time in the town of Aegina, one of the first capitals of modern Greece. This system was later used in the old orphanage of Athens, but was finally condemned in 1848 by Patriarch Anthimos VI.

Meanwhile, in 1844 - 45, Anthimos Nikolaides and John Chaviaras, chanters of the two Greek churches in Vienna, published in European staff notation a number of semi-traditional Greek hymns, cloaked in Western harmonies written by August Swoboda, Gotfried Prayer and K. B. Randhartinger [27]*.

The Holy Synod of Constantinople condemned this practice in 1846 as “profligate” and generally “unsuitable” [28]*. The charm of tertian harmony, however, was irresistible to the Greeks and the practice soon spread over all the country. In 1870, after a series of heated articles in the periodical, *Αἶων* by G. Mantzavinos, professor at the Rizareios theological school in Athens, a four-part choir was established in the Athens cathedral [29]*.

In 1871 the first music conservatory was founded in Greece, the Ὡδεδεῖον Ἀθηνῶν. Alexander Catacouzenos, a professor of the conservatory, devised a new way of harmonizing church hymns «inspired by the Byzantine melodies but following the art of the Russian church” [30]*. His

compositions were used in the royal chapel during the reign of Queen Olga, who was of Russian origin. By 1875 the church realized the great popularity of harmonized hymns and permitted them to be chanted in the Athens cathedral during celebrations of royal and national feasts.

In 1881 Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople ordered the formation of a committee for a serious study of church music. The committee introduced absolute pitch and the use of the tuning fork, corrected the mathematical values of the intervals given by Chrysanthos and assigned a definite tempo to the various classes of church hymns, introducing the use of the metronome[31]*. The findings of the committee were published in a manual entitled “Στοιχειώδης μέθοδος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν τῆς βυζαντινῆς μουσικῆς ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει μουσικῆς ἐπιτροπῆς τοῦ 1881” (“*An elementary method for the Instruction of Byzantine Music prepared by the 1881 Committee on Music in Constantinople*”). In 1882 members of the committee built a musical instrument capable of reproducing the microtones in the tradi ...

Back book cover

One cannot fully comprehend the meaning of liturgy in the Church, whether in East or West without an understanding and appreciation of the musical forms by which the Word itself is conveyed. *Studies in Eastern Chant* is an on-going series which provides scholars in music with the opportunity to publish the results of their latest research. Articles in the present volume of this important journal include: "*A Medieval Slavonic Theoretical Treatise on Music*", by Stefan Lazarov, "*Notes on Cyprian the Hymnographer*", by Mariangela Arata, "*A New*

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- [1] Oliver Strunk, "A Cypriot in Venice". *Naralicia musicologica: Knud Jeppesen septuagenario collegis oblata*, Copenhagen, 1962, pp. 101-13.
- [2] The earlier 'interpretations' known are those by Balasios (c. 1670). There followed, up to 1814, close to 45 'interpreters', among which were Panagiotēs Chalatzoglou, John of Trebizond, Peter the Peloponnesian, Peter Byzantinos, James the Protopsaltes, George the Cretan, Chrysanthos and his collaborators.
- [3] Γραμματική Κωνστάλα, Korae Library (Chios) MS 194. fol. 45^v.
- [4] In G. Papadopoulos's *Συμβολαὶ εἰς τὴν ἱστορίαν τῆς παρ' ἡμῖν ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μουσικῆς* Athens, 1890, pp. 12, 317, 318, 329, 331 and 324, we get the impression that Chrysanthos's reform was the outcome of a sequence of similar improvements that started in 1756 with John of Trebizond. His *system* was improved first by his students George the Cretan and Peter Peloponnesian and again by the students of the former, Gregory the Protopsaltes and Chourmouzios the Chartophylax, and of the latter, Peter Byzantios, the teacher of Chrysanthos.
- [5] For a description of the position held by the Patriarchate during the years 1453 to 1821 and its attitude towards the Greek people, see Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 391-406.
- [6] Spyros B. Markezines, *Πολιτικὴ ἱστορία τῆς νεωτέρας Ἑλλάδος*, Athens, 1966, p. 53.
- [7] Jacob Goar, *Εὐχολόγιον* Paris, 1647, p. 349.
- [8] This person was Gabriel, first chanter in the Patriarchal Church of Cairo. Villoteau complains that Gabriel was unable to explain the function of the 'great signs'. Villoteau, *De l'art musical en Égypte* (Vol. 14 of *Description de l'Égypte*) transl. into Greek by Eug. Perdikares, Venice, 1874, p. 32.
- [9] Γραμματική Κωνστάλα, Korae Library (Chios) MS 194. fol. 45^v.
- [10] The first printed editions of Greek music were made in Bucarest by Peter Ephesios, a student of the three teachers. There, in 1820, he published the first two music editions, the *Ἀναστασιματάριον* and the *Σύντομον Δοξαστάριον* of Peter the Peloponnesian. The first Greek musician to have his work published during his own lifetime was Chrysanthos with his *Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὸ θεωρητικὸν καὶ πρακτικὸν τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μουσικῆς*, Paris, 1821 (hereafter referred to as *Εἰσαγωγή*).
- [11] Oliver Strunk, op. cit, pp. 102-3.

- [12] Chrysanthos of Madytos, *Εἰσαγωγή*, p. 54.
- [13] "The subdivision of two of these neumes was also contrived by Hieronymus in the mid-16th century in an astonishingly similar way. See Oliver Strunk, op. cit. p. 103.
- [14] "G. Papadopoulos says (op. cit., p. 333) that the new sol-fa system reduced the study of music to ten months from the ten years which were required before.
- [15] Although Chrysanthos was aware of Guido's system (see the *Μέγα θεωρητικὸν τῆς μουσικῆς*, Trieste, 1832, p. 9, par. 21 and n.a.), G. Papadopoulos says (op. cit., p. 334) that the new sol-fa system was derived from that of St. Ambrose whom he credits (p. 131) with the invention of the system using the syllables: *ne, ou, tos, oun, a, na, ve, ne, ne, ou, tos, ke, ka, ta, ve, ne*.
- [16] C. Papademetriou (ed.), *Εἰσαγωγή*, 2nd ed., Athens, 1940, p. ζ '
- [17] Op. cit., p. 341.
- [20] They are given in Appendix II, p. 265 of my English translation of the book. This translation was a thesis which I submitted to the School of Music, Indiana University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music.
- [21] Melpo Merlier, op. cit., p. 243.
- [22] B. Rebours, *Traité de Psaltique. Théorie et pratique du chant dans l'Église grecque*, Paris, 1906, p. xiii.
- [23] Even today this science is not taught in any Greek educational institution,
- [24] Byzantine history was taught in the first Greek University, the University of Athens, fifteen years after its opening in 1837. The lack of esteem held for this civilization is noticeable from the mid-9th century. In 1859 a professor of the university spoke about the "lack of critical mind, method and aesthetic judgment, which are the general characteristics of the Byzantines" (Constantine Paparregopoulos, *Προλεγόμενα*, Athens, 1970, pp. 12, 39-41).
- [25] H. J. W. Tillyard has argued against this notion in two papers, both entitled "*The Stenographic Theory of Byzantine Music*" in *Laudate* II, 1924, pp. 216-225 and *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* XXV, 1925, 333-338.
- [26] Op. cit., p. 375.

- [27] Details in P. E. Formozes, *Οί χορωδιακές εκδόσεις της εκκλησιαστικής μουσικής σὲ εὐρωπαϊκὴ μοθσικὴ γραφὴ*, Thessaloniki, 1967.
- [28] C. Papademetriou, *Τὸ μουσικὸν ζήτημα ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, Athens, 1921, p. 10.
- [29] A list of Greek hymns translated into English and arranged for mixed choir, piano or organ is in J. M. Neale, *Hymns of the Eastern Church*, London, 1876, pp. 21-22.
- [30] C. Papademetriou, op. cit., p. 13.
- [31] The following values were assigned to the intervals: *nE*—6, *pA*—5, *Bou*-4, *Ga*-6, *ZW*-6, *kE*-5, *Zo*-4. Cf. the values assigned by Chrysanthos: *nE*-12, *pA*-9, *Bou*-7, *Ga*-12, *Di*-12, *kE*-9, *Zo*-7. The committee made use of five tempi: Slow = 56-80 MM, Medium = 80-100 MM, Moderate = 100-168 MM, Fast = 168-208 MM, Very Fast (*χῦμα*) = 208 (*Στοιχειώδης μέθοδος...*, *Φόρμιγξ*», 15-30 July 1908).